

March 14, 2022

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, distinguished members of the Joint Committee on the Judiciary.

My name is Angela Bellas and I am a PhD Candidate at the UConn School of Social Work, a Manchester resident, a member of CT Mutual Aid: East of the River and Uniting for a Safe Inclusive Community- Manchester (USIC).

I am writing **IN SUPPORT** of:

- [S.B. No. 387](#) AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE JUVENILE JUSTICE POLICY AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE.
- [S.B. No. 392](#) AN ACT CONCERNING STATEMENTS MADE BY JUVENILES.

I am writing **IN STRONG OPPOSITION** to the following bills:

- [S.B. No. 365](#) AN ACT CONCERNING JUVENILE AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORMS
- S.B. No. 388: AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEFENSE OF A PERSON OR A PERSON'S DWELLING, PLACE OF WORK OR MOTOR VEHICLE.
- [H.B. No. 5418](#) AN ACT REVISING JUVENILE AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE STATUTES AND INSURANCE STATUTES CONCERNING THEFT OF A MOTOR VEHICLE
- [H.B. No. 5417](#) AN ACT CONCERNING JUVENILE JUSTICE AND SERVICES AND FIREARMS BACKGROUND CHECKS.
- [S.B. No. 386](#) AN ACT CONCERNING A STUDY OF THE JUVENILE DELINQUENCY LAWS OF THIS STATE.
- [S.B. No. 16](#) AN ACT ADDRESSING GUN VIOLENCE AND JUVENILE CRIME

I **strongly oppose** these bills because they are rooted in false, racialized claims that Connecticut is experiencing tremendously high rates of crime being committed by youth. This is simply not supported by data. This crime rhetoric is being used to cause fear and push for reforms that, in the end, will result in more Black and Brown youth and low-income white youth becoming ensnared in the juvenile justice system. This will not provide a solution for any issues related to crime in our state. There is a wide volume of data explaining the negative impacts of the over-surveillance and incarceration of youth- including poor physical and mental health outcomes in adulthood, increased risk of suicide, decreased academic achievement and increased recidivism (Barnert et. al., 2017; Hatoum, 2018; Lambie & Randell, 2013). The criminalization of youth hurts individuals, families, communities and society- disproportionately impacting Black and Brown communities. Racial disparities in the surveillance and incarceration of youth are well documented (Hockenberry, 2020; NACDL, 2021; Rovner, 2021). Knowing this, we cannot allow our criminal justice system to continue to recreate and enforce structural racism in the state of Connecticut.

I strongly oppose H.B. 5417 and its provisions for electronically monitoring youth. Michelle Alexander, well known for her 2010 seminal work, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, aptly describes e-monitoring as “a blatant manifestation of ‘the newest’ Jim Crow, or the systemic oppression of African Americans through the criminal-justice system. Under e-carceration, limits on mobility may make it difficult or impossible to get or keep a job, attend school, care for your kids or visit family members. You’re effectively sentenced to an open-air digital prison, one that may not extend beyond your house, your block or your neighborhood” (Alexander, 2019). The provisions of H.B. 5417 create unnecessary financial burdens for our state and would essentially lead to further criminalization of low-income youth- particularly Black and Brown youth. Instead, Connecticut must be at the vanguard of continued decarceration and invest in our youth- in accessible, culturally responsive mental health services; in safe and affordable housing for families;

in expanded access to sustainably harvested foods and quality, culturally responsive healthcare; in culturally responsive education infrastructure; in parks and green spaces; in free college education; in access to creative spaces and arts-based activities. We must replace the school-to-prison pipeline with school-to-thriving pipelines. Rather than investing more in law enforcement and court systems, Connecticut must invest more in our young people and in our communities that are struggling to remain housed as we face an escalating crisis in affordable housing- with rents that have risen as much as 40% across the state since the pandemic started two years ago.

I have seen too many young people, disproportionately Black and Brown youth, separated from families and community- separations that lead to learning loss, loss of social capital, and the negative indicators associated with living with the stigma of incarceration- all because our criminal justice system is built to over-surveil and criminalize young people of color. Connecticut has made great strides to decrease the number of youth incarcerated over the past decade. We must continue on this path. H.B. 5417 and many of the bills discussed today will only serve to turn back the clock. Please do not support these racialized, regressive policies. Consider the lives of our young people- our future.

Pandemic life, climate catastrophe and the global threat of war already constitute enormous challenges that we must be fortifying and supporting our youth to face now and in the years to come. Invest in Connecticut's young people, not a criminal justice system grounded in white supremacy and racial capitalism. I write these words as a macro social worker, as a mother, and as a community member dedicated to rebuilding a world where all of our children have the opportunity to survive and THRIVE. I write to testify that I continue to bear witness to how racist dog whistle politics have led to the development of the bills outlined above. Just as I witnessed national rhetoric leading to the racist and highly problematic crime bill of 1994 and as I have studied the public narratives that laid the groundwork for the racist War on Drugs. I am disheartened and disappointed that 21st Century legislators are yet again poised to set our young people up for what similarly will result in racialized violations of their innate human rights as outlined in the 1948 U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I urge you today- do better for our young people- for OUR FUTURE.

I also urge you to SUPPORT [S.B. No. 392](#) and [S.B. No. 387](#) with the recommendations submitted by the [Connecticut Justice Alliance](#).

Sincerely,

Angela Bellas, MSW, PhD Candidate, UConn School of Social Work
Manchester, CT Resident
Uniting for a Safe Inclusive Community, CT Mutual Aid: East of the River